

2007

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Recommended Citation

Mantonya, Kurt and Wall, Milan (2007) "Economic Development in Indian Country: Traits that Lead to Sustainability," *Online Journal of Rural Research & Policy*: Vol. 2: Iss. 3. <https://doi.org/10.4148/ojrrp.v2i3.37>

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Economic Development in Indian Country: Traits that Lead to Sustainability

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Recommended Citation Style (MLA):

Mantonya, Kurt, and Milan Wall. "Economic Development in Indian Country: Traits that Lead to Sustainability." The Online Journal of Rural Research and Policy 3 (2007): 1-36.

Keywords: Economic development, Indian Country , economic opportunities for reservation residents, development perspectives, subjugated, what works in one place, will work here, development, sustainable economic opportunities, Heartland Center for Leadership Development, United Tribes Technical College, UTTC, Economic Development Administration. EDA, Denver Region, case studies, promising programs, positive economic conditions, rural, research, academic, peer-reviewed, university, college, geography, sociology, political science, architecture, law, science, biology, chemistry, physics, leadership studies, community service, agriculture, communications, mass communications, new media, Internet, web.

Abstract

Economic development in Indian Country has a long history of various programs intended to provide economic opportunities for reservation residents. Many of these programs have failed due in part to development perspectives that subjugated the people to "what works in one place, will work here" theory of development. In order to help create sustainable economic opportunities, the Heartland Center for Leadership Development in conjunction with [United Tribes Technical College \(UTTC\)](#) and support from the [Economic Development Administration \(EDA\)](#), [Denver Region](#), conducted a series of case studies focusing on promising programs in Indian Country that were meeting with success. These case studies reflect the positive economic conditions in order to build on them and provide a framework for other communities to follow.

Introduction

Economic development in Indian Country has a long history of various programs intended to provide economic opportunities for reservation residents. Many of these programs have failed due in part to development perspectives that subjugated the people to "what works in one place, will work here" theory of development. In order to help create sustainable economic opportunities, the Heartland Center for Leadership Development in conjunction with [United Tribes Technical College \(UTTC\)](#) and support from the [Economic Development Administration](#)

[\(EDA\), Denver Region](#), conducted a series of case studies focusing on promising programs in Indian Country that were meeting with success. These case studies reflect the positive economic conditions in order to build on them and provide a framework for other communities to follow.

During the course of this project, the Heartland Center has developed a series of teaching profiles and case studies built on the information collected from the fieldwork. A descriptive case study (this text and the subsequent chapters) delves more in depth into the reservation economies, ethnographies, demographic profiles, and economic development projects. The teaching profile “tells the story” of economic development and entrepreneurship on the reservations and gives examples of what is working.

The initial training for UTTC was conducted in April 2006 and brought together tribal planners and others engaged in economic development from 19 reservations in the Denver EDA Region. From this training and the fieldwork, the Heartland Center formulated a list of characteristics of reservations positioned for economic development success. This list will be incorporated into a workbook design for tribal council use and training purposes.

Reservation Selection Process

During the selection process, a Project Advisory Committee was established to aid in the selection. This included EDA tribal planners, state departments of Commerce personnel, tribal liaisons from the [American Indian Higher Education Consortium](#). Additionally, Karen Paetz of UTTC-University Center; Barbara Schmitt, UTCC-University Center, and Mary Emery, [North Central Regional Center for Rural Development](#) also served in an advisory role.

The purpose was to identify reservations and/or communities in Indian Country that are successfully addressing their community and economic development challenges. In particular, we looked for those reservations that have helped the community and its members develop assets, that have created positive job opportunities for Indian people, and that have nurtured entrepreneurial activities to create assets and jobs.

The following criteria represent indicators that UTTC Staff and the Project Advisory Committee used to select sites for case studies of economic development successes on reservations. In particular, we looked for examples of reservations/reservation communities that have developed successful tribally supported enterprises, generated good jobs from a variety of sources, and expanded tribal support of entrepreneurship.

I. Willingness to cooperate in the study:

1. Interest of a tribal planner in participating in and cooperating in the project, including assistance with identification of individuals/groups to be interviewed and participation in the interview process.
2. Tribal Council support of and cooperation in this project.

3. Willingness of the appropriate tribal representative(s) to review draft case studies for accuracy and sensitivity to proprietary information.

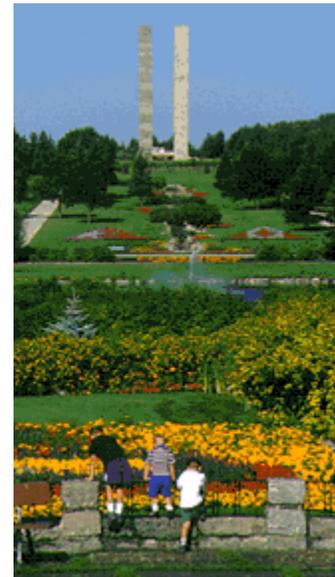
II. Experience of the tribe in undertaking successful economic development strategies and/or tribal support of entrepreneurship.

1. Diversity in types of economic development strategies undertaken.
2. Diversity in geography, tribal experience in economic development, magnitude of tribal economic development activities, and tribal success in economic development.
3. Diversity in funding/technical assistance resources that support tribal economic development.
4. Creation of good jobs.
5. Building of community and individual assets.
6. Attention to appropriate use of culture in businesses ventures.

Research Methodology

Fieldwork was conducted utilizing the interview protocol developed by UTTC and the Heartland Center with consultation from the Project Advisory Committee. Team members Valerie Shangreaux, Milan Wall, Kurt Mantonya, and Mema-shua Grant conducted the interviews.

A comprehensive literature review was also conducted on topics that include economic development, entrepreneurship, and the ethnography of each tribe. Using this two tiered approach (primary and secondary sources) helped to triangulate our findings. While site visits took place, field team members were encouraged to pick up any information they could find on the tribe and economic development programs or agencies to further bolster this literature review. The survey instrument was based on an Appreciative Inquiry approach that basically focuses on the positive aspects of a community and asks “what is going right” rather than focusing on the traditional needs or what is lacking. Once the data was analyzed, a case study was produced as well as a teaching profile for each tribe in the study. An example of each from the [Turtle Mountain Reservation](#) can be found later in this article.



During the fieldwork, informants were asked permission to conduct and record the interviews, and wishes were respected if they wanted to refrain from recording. A coding scheme was created when placed in the access database to further protect anonymity.

Profiles of the Reservation Communities and Economic Development Literature Review

The case studies and teaching profiles of the reservations in this study paper pose some interesting similarities and differences that should be kept in mind when developing economic development training curricula. For the sake of brevity, this article utilizes the case study and profile from the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians. Besides the Turtle Mountain tribe, other tribes taking part in the study include the Rosebud of South Dakota, the Flathead (Salish and Kootenai) of Montana, the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska, and the Wind River (Northern Arapaho and Eastern Shoshoni) of Wyoming.

Before synthesizing the data, it is important to define the concept of “economic development” from a Native perspective. Smith (2000)¹, a Mohawk, defines “Economic development is simply the utilization and development of natural and human resources available to produce marketable goods and services to exchange with other segments of the global economy for other goods and services” (Smith 2000:16)².

A sampling of definitions of economic development from the study sample include “Economic pursuits that are culturally, ceremonially, tribally sensitive that generate revenue for tribes while still structurally embracing the jurisdictional sovereign issues of the tribal governments maintaining environmentally, culturally, and social ways.” Another definition is “the creation of jobs. Increase in income, spendable or discretionary income.” One informant said economic development is “the advanced pursuit of economic activity through education, technical development, things of that nature.”

The reservations in the study each face similar economic development, social, health, and cultural challenges. Besides some of the highest rates of alcoholism, diabetes, and suicide, Native communities also have high rates of drug abuse, crime, homelessness, low life expectancy, and high unemployment rates. Within the economic development spectrum, “The economic structures of Native American reservations differ considerably from non-reservation economies of similar population or land area. First, most reservations face exorbitantly high rates of unemployment. Furthermore much of the employment available on reservations involves governmental work of some sort” (Smith 2000:53)³.

The reservations also face similar economic development challenges that hinder their development. Like many reservations in rural America, they are land rich but cash poor, yet land is largely undeveloped. Because much of it is held in federal trust, land cannot typically be used as collateral. In fact, in a 2006 report⁴ by the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, the author found “many tracts of land owned by Indians are ‘fractionated’; the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) has divided titles equally among all heirs over several generations, resulting in small, unusable holdings. The most fractionated tract in the BIA’s Great Plains region has over 1,300 owners, according to the Indian Land Tenure Foundation in Little Canada, Minn. A recent public

television documentary reported a Standing Rock Reservation tract that measured five inches by five inches” (Clement 2006:5)⁵.

Three of the reservations in this study are ranked among the 100 lowest income counties in the United States. Todd County (Rosebud) ranked the highest at number 5. Rolette County (Turtle Mountain) is ranked at 53, and Thurston County (Winnebago and Omaha) is ranked at 58. Todd County was also ranked in the 100 poorest counties by median household income at 32nd (\$20,035) (Wikipedia 2006)⁶.

Jorgensen and Taylor (n.d.)⁷ note “poverty in Indian Country is a political problem not an economic one. There has been a substantial supply of labor in Indian Country for decades, yet scores of economic development plans have been unable to tap that supply on a sustained basis and thereby improve the fortunes of Indian households” (pg. 4). The majority of jobs on the reservations are with the tribal government, Bureau of Indian Affairs, schools, and a few private businesses. Business development on reservations “is difficult for individual Indians because of the collateral needed to obtain loans and because of the lack of management training and experience that prepares one for beginning business” (Grobsmith 1981:33)⁸.

Reservation communities are also geographically isolated from urban centers and the service benefits that larger communities offer. For example, one informant in Belcourt, North Dakota, noted that when “someone needs a refrigeration technician they have to drive from Minot or Bismarck which is over 100 miles away and we are paying for their time on the road.” Another informant from Wind River also noted a similar pattern of people driving into town to do their shopping “because it is cheaper, when in fact by the time you figure in your time and gas money, it is in fact not.” Another informant, an entrepreneur who runs a Wind River trading post, told us that their prices are cheaper on certain products such as buffalo hides, pottery, and cradleboards as compared to larger cities like Denver and Cheyenne that have a larger population base and attract more tourists.

In another Harvard report, “What Determines Indian Economic Success? Evidence from Tribal and Individual Enterprises” by Jorgensen and Taylor (n.d.)⁹ emphasizes three keys to economic development. They are sovereignty matters, culture matters, and institutions matter.

They concluded that poverty in Indian country is political and not economic: even with an adequate supply of labor, economic development plans have not been able to tap this supply and provide sustained programs for people living on the reservations. During the study, the researchers conducted statistical analysis from surveys of 70 respondents on a number of questions including:

- Does using technical assistance help firms?
- Does employing tribal or other Indian workers increase success of firms?

- Does advertising more help?
- Does exploitation of Indian resources or tribes' other comparative advantages (like special economic niches) increase success of firms?
- Does creating boards of directors contribute to success?
- Does board structure matter, particularly separation from political leadership?
- Does tribal ownership matter to success?
- Does turnover in enterprise management affect success?

Separating politics from business was among the key findings in which enterprises with corporate boards did not perform markedly differently than enterprises without corporate boards but it was the existence of a non-politicized board that mattered to success. Some additional findings are highlighted below

- Tribal ownership of enterprises was correlated with reduced success in the enterprise.
- Employing tribal or other Native American workers did not have an impact either positively or negatively on the success of the enterprise.
- Advertising and success were not correlated.
- Management turnover does not affect success.

Their conclusion is that those tribal enterprises that are free from political pressure tend to be more successful; but this is also an instance where the tribes do have control over their own governments and can adapt to this change to make tribal enterprises more successful. They also note in a 1992 study that tribes that have current governmental structures that are in line with traditional structures are more likely to become economically successful.

Resources Matter

Building off of these three keys, the research from this project and a review of the literature also indicates that resources matter and “to fully develop the available human and natural resources, the tribe must do the following.

First, it must formulate a positive atmosphere for growth. This includes supporting and maintaining a stable tribal government. It may be necessary for tribal members to forgo short-term nitpicking in order to develop long-term sustainability.

Second, the tribe needs to actively recruit outside investors and partners in the development process.

Third, the tribe must aid tribal members in their individual entrepreneurial activities.

Fourth, the tribe must develop a comprehensive plan of action but this plan must be flexible enough to address alternatives as they become apparent” (Smith 2000:68)¹⁰.

Howard Dean Smith, in his book, “Modern Tribal Development: Paths to Self-Sufficiency and Cultural Integrity in Indian Country” (2000)¹¹, provides a good overall synthesis of economic development on reservations. Smith heavily stresses the importance of maintaining cultural continuity while achieving a sovereign state no longer dependent on federal aid, a path that ultimately leads to true self-determination. “The quest is to design an economic structure that allows the rest of society to maintain its cultural integrity and develop new and improved methods of living. In many cases cultural issues outweigh economic activity” (Smith 2000:12)¹² and “economic development is not necessarily synonymous with cultural development” (Smith 2000:14)¹³.

Entrepreneurship in Indian Country

Entrepreneurship and small business development are becoming more popular modes of generating household revenue. In fact, “entrepreneurship has been a part of Native American culture for centuries, but it was lost in the reservation system. Now we must get it back” (Clement 2006:3)¹⁴, quoting David “White Thunder” Trottier in the March 2006 issue of the *Fedgazette*). Davis Glass of the American Indian Economic Development Fund prefers “Indianpreneur.” The term “entrepreneur is inadequate for the people who start them, given their culture and struggles they face...Indianpreneur, a modern day warrior, because being in business these days is the equivalent of being in battle. An Indianpreneur has a high sensitivity to community, family, and self” (Clement 2006:3)¹⁵.

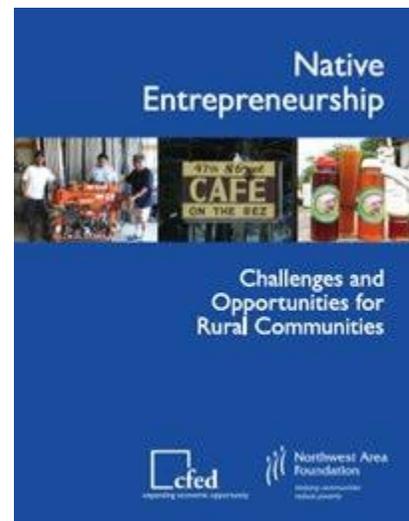
All of the reservations we visited exhibited several forms of entrepreneurship and agencies or organizations that foster the development of entrepreneurs, such as the Wind River Development Fund or the Turtle Mountain Renewal Community. Many of these small businesses credit the ever-expanding realm of Indian gaming that generates dollars for the tribe but also promotes tourism. All tribes we visited had gaming of some form or another, with all leaning toward Vegas style gaming in the future, as it is more profitable than bingo parlors.

Entrepreneurship in Indian Country faces numerous obstacles. Among those, noted by Bregendahl and Flora (2002:1)¹⁶ “1) marginalization and exploitation, 2) empowerment, sovereignty and policy; and 3) the meaning of culture.” They also continue to stress the specific obstacles to overcome when creating an outreach program and include “1) services and access, 2) credit and financing, 3) value chains and marketing, 4) building social capital, 5) making the most of cultural capital, 6) augmenting human capital, and 7) enhancing tribal assets.”

Adamson and King (2002)¹⁷ in the Native American Entrepreneurship Report also cited similar barriers to entrepreneurship in a survey delivered to 70 institutions that provide services to Native entrepreneurs. Their findings include

- A lack of financing to prospective entrepreneurs.
- A lack of education and experience about business (specifically identified areas include marketing, general business practices, writing a plan, and completing a loan application).
- Technical assistance and training are critical components and 43% of total operating expenses are spent on this category.
- Financial institutions that do provide financial assistance are often themselves very small and are challenged by small loan pools, small staff, and small budgets.

The volume of research literature is not overwhelming on entrepreneurship in Indian Country; but a few studies do stand out. Malkin et al (2004)¹⁸ note, “there is a need to conduct statewide and reservation-based case studies to collect effective practices on strategies currently underway to promote Native entrepreneurship.” First and foremost is the research undertaken by the [Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development](#). In 2004 the Northwest Area Foundation and CFED published “Native Entrepreneurship: Challenges and Opportunities for Rural Communities.” In this two-year study involving 60 participants, they found that Native entrepreneurship is a vehicle for poverty reduction. The study cites statistics that show increased small business development on American Indian reservations. The authors emphasize not only the dichotomy between urban and rural but also the difference in Native and non-Native business and entrepreneurship. The report emphasizes the importance of culturally appropriate entrepreneurship development strategies when establishing a business. Also within the cultural context, other findings include: 1) issues of control and use of assets are critical in any Native entrepreneurship development strategy, 2) Native Americans have had a long history of individual entrepreneurship, which continues today, 3) for many Native Americans, entrepreneurship is about utilizing individual initiative to benefit the whole community, 4) Native entrepreneurship development is a holistic strategy, and 5) Native Americans who live and work on reservations have very little experience working in, managing, or owning businesses.



Reservation Profiles

This section discusses the reservations in the study and touches on some of the similarities and emerging issues collected during the fieldwork. More detailed information on each reservation and their respective findings can be found in the respective case study and teaching profile.

Tribal Council Terms

The tribal councils differ from reservation to reservation in their political structure and terms. For example, the Rosebud tribal council has a tribal president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, and sergeant-at-arms. There are 13 districts represented on the reservation and each has its own councilperson or number of councilpersons. For example, district 13 Bulls Creek/Milks Camp has one councilman while District 3 (Antelope) has four members. The districts send a total of 20 councilpersons along with the five in tribal leadership for 25 total members. The length of the term is for two years and there is no term limit in place.

The Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians has a Tribal Council of nine persons that includes a president and two council members from each of the four districts. Members serve a two-year term.

The Wind River reservation is home to the Northern Arapaho and Eastern Shoshone. Both tribes have their own separate councils that each meet about three times a year. The tribes are governed by a Joint Business Council with six members from each tribe elected to a two-year term. The Joint Business Council is responsible for all day-to-day activities on matters that concern jointly owned resources and programs, including all land resources of which each tribe owns 50%. The chairman of the Joint Business Council alternates between an Arapaho chair and a Shoshoni chair every two years.

The Confederated Tribes of the Salish and Kootenai Flathead Reservation council is made up of ten members that serve staggered terms. Five of the members serve two years and five serve for four years. The Winnebago tribal council has eight members who serve a one-year term.

An emerging theme from informants on all reservations was that there needed to be a change in the terms. A strategy such as four year staggered terms much like the Flathead would be a preferred governmental structure. Structuring the government this way would provide continuity and consistency as tribal council members would have longer periods of time to work on tribal issues rather than spending the first part of their term learning the position and the last part of their term working on re-election and avoiding decisions that may threaten constituencies

Demographic Profiles

The demographic profile of each reservation is found in the respective case studies. It should be noted that U.S. Bureau of the Census numbers are not always an accurate reflection of reservation populations. Below are some selected statistics for the reader to become more

familiar with the reservations. The youngest reservation is Rosebud with a median age of 21.5, while the oldest is Flathead with a median age of 37.4. The reservation with the highest percentage of Native American alone or in combination is Turtle Mountain at 96.5% Native American followed closely by Rosebud with 87.5% Native American. The Wind River reservation has the smallest percentage with 29.5% Native American, though Flathead is very close with 30.1%.

Indian Reorganization Act

While the [Indian Reorganization Act \(IRA\)](#) in 1934 created tribal governments, not all tribes became IRA tribes. Of the tribes in this case study, both Turtle Mountain and the Arapaho and Shoshone of the Wind River Reservation are non-IRA tribes. The others, Flathead (Salish and Kootenai), Rosebud, and Winnebago are. IRA tribes are those that reorganized under the Wheeler-Howard Act of 1934, which “strengthened tribal governments and restored the bilateral relationship between the federal government and tribes; (2) stopped the sale of allotments and restored tribal lands to communal holdings; (3) provided procedures and funds for tribal economic development; (4) granted preferential hiring of Indians in the Bureau of Indian Affairs; and (5) recognized and aided tribes in maintaining and developing their cultures, especially their language, religion, and crafts” (O’Brien 1989:82)¹⁹. The main advantages of the IRA include the re-establishment of tribal governments, the ending the loss of Indian lands, and the halt to allotment. With regard to Wind River, tribal lands were even expanded. This boilerplate legislation burdened some tribes because it centralized the governmental structure and put the decision making into the hands of one person, such as the tribal chair or chief. This does not work well with all tribes because of the sharing of leadership roles historically. “No one person in an American Indian tribe was always a leader, and many were leaders at different times. Leadership was distributed among capable and respected persons. The people chose an individual to lead a particular project which, when concluded, ended his or her leadership” (Johnston 1995)²⁰.

Tribal Emerging Issues

The tribes participating in this project are all unique and different from language to culture to geographic location. Besides having some of the highest unemployment rates, rampant poverty, and isolation that limits opportunities, all tribes face some other common issues, especially in relation to economic development. The first set of emerging themes came out of the fieldwork conducted. The second series of themes was born out of the training conducted in April, 2006, in Bismarck.

Fieldwork Emerging Themes

- Casinos are a significant source of revenue and job creation but they also experience significant employee turnover.

- It is very important to have one or more champions for economic development. Tribal councils with two-year terms often have difficulty sustaining long term economic development strategies.
- Tribes do promote the establishment of businesses on reservations.
- People are very aware of successful models and studies such as Ho-Chunk, Harvard Project, NIBA, Minnesota American Indian Chamber of Commerce, and Pequot Casino.
- The most successful economic development strategies include a strong education component and emphasis on financial literacy that include teaching entrepreneurs the basics of writing a business plan to buying inventory and handling the till, to getting direction through the council.
- Signs of success of economic development in Indian Country include reduction in unemployment, sustainability, increased education, and retaining revenues in the community.
- Typical outcomes considered positive include lowered poverty levels, better housing and infrastructure, extra income, and sustainable strategies that are environmentally, socially, culturally, and ceremonially sound.
- The greatest challenges in economic development include politics, competition between urban and rural, understanding financing, escaping the BIA mentality, and creating entrepreneurs.
- Infrastructure issues (e.g., public transportation and childcare centers) are great hindrances to people getting to or being able to work.
- Sustainability means permanent employment, expansion, access to capital for entrepreneurs, and maintaining a quality of life for tribal members. Casinos are not always seen as economic development.

Training Emerging Themes

- Tribes have a pool of money to invest from the casino, dam or other source – the government makes a decision to leverage this money.
- Different tribes starting at different levels – everyone is not all at the same spot.
- Relationship of tribal planner and tribal council is important

[\(Additional Comments\)](#)

Tribal Success Stories

During the course of the interviews, one of the questions focused on successful economic development programs in Indian Country. Several people cited examples such as the Mississippi Choctaw, Pequots, and Ho-Chunk Inc. The following looks at these examples as best practices mentioned during the interview phase.

The Mississippi Choctaw

The [Mississippi Choctaw](#) example is one of slow and sustained growth, one that was not dependent on the revenue generated from a casino. With unemployment rates at all time highs in the 1960's, one of the first objectives was to create jobs. The tribe utilized funds from the Bureau of Indian Affairs for low-income housing construction, and the tribe started building these houses while teaching their members a skill. This led to the formation of Chahta Development, a construction company established in 1969. During the 1970's the tribe focused its attention on recruiting businesses to the reservation via the creation of an industrial park. In 1979, Chahta Enterprises opened its doors as a company manufacturing wiring harnesses for the automotive industry. During the same period, American Greetings Corporation was courted and opened a 120,000 square foot facility in 1981 that employs 250 people. Importantly, "for the first time in Indian country, Industrial Revenue Bonds were issued by the local non-Indian government to finance the construction of a facility on the reservation" ([Economic Development History: How We Got Here](#), n.d.)

During the 1980's and 1990's other businesses that opened include Choctaw Electronics Enterprise (1985), Choctaw Manufacturing Enterprise, First American Printing and Direct Mail, and First American Plastic Molding Enterprise (1990's). These enterprises employed 2,000 people by 1998. During this time, the tribe also diversified its portfolio into the retail, service, and social services sector. Choctaw Residential Center with 120 beds and 125 employees was opened along with a retail center that harbors a bank, grocery store, and a convenience store. In the service sector, Choctaw Office Supply, Choctaw Post Office, and Choctaw Forestry cropped up. ([Choctaw Vision](#), 2007)



Globalization and tenacious leadership helped evolve the next phase in the economic development plan of the MCBI. With automotive jobs being outsourced to other countries, the MCBI joined the economic bandwagon opening three plants in Mexico. Today, the tribe employs 8,000 people and is a leader in regional economic development. The path to get there was not an easy one, but effective leadership, vision, flexibility, and building economic networks have put the tribe on a sustained path.

Ho-Chunk, Inc.



Ask anyone involved in economic development in Indian country and they will tell you to look at the Ho-Chunk model or “what Lance is doing,” referring to Lance Morgan, the CEO of [Ho-Chunk, Inc.](#) (HCI). Because of the success of the Ho-Chunk, several tribal groups have visited the reservation and many studies have also been conducted. Shawn Bordeaux’s “A Case Study of a Model Tribal Economic Development Company” (2003)²¹, his Master’s thesis, provides an excellent overview. HCI is the wholly owned economic development corporation of the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska. It started in 1991 and has grown from one employee with annual revenues of \$400,000 to 323 employees and over \$67 million in revenue (2003)²².

The primary business interests are in a \$26 million tobacco and fuel distribution company; ten convenience stores that are bringing in \$25 million in revenue; the largest modular home building company in Minnesota, at \$15 million in revenue; a construction company; an information technology company; an office products company, a hotel; investments in apartments and hotels all over the country; and two of the largest internet companies in the country with ALLnative.com and, a retail e-commerce site; and Indianz.com, the largest Native American news and entertainment web site in the country as of 2003.

The tribe saw the need of developing an economic development engine in the early 1990’s. They had opened WinneVegas Casino in 1992 and the beginning saw success. But competition from the neighboring Omaha Tribe’s CasinOmaha and the development of riverboat gaming and other casinos in Council Bluffs and Sioux City, Iowa, caused profits to dwindle. During the development and construction of these casinos. The tribe decided to focus their attention of economic development and thus HCI was born. The tribe diverted a percentage of the casino profits into the corporation, until the goal of eight million dollars was reached. This gave the corporation the needed long-term start-up capital it required. Another factor in the success of the corporation, and a finding from the Harvard Project, is that removing tribal council politics from the involvement and oversight of HCI allowed the company to operate—through its unique corporate structure—free from the typical political interference many tribes experience.

A spin-off of Ho-Chunk, Inc. is the Ho-Chunk Community Development Corporation. The purpose of HCCDC is to provide community services to people in the community such as providing low-income restricted mortgages, down payment housing assistance, a business development center with a business incubator, and a revolving loan and micro loan program to help small business and entrepreneurs succeed. The strategy of integrating the nonprofit development corporation into the overall long-term planning and development process of Ho-Chunk, Inc., is intended to allow the company a means to develop the reservation community utilizing the advantages of a nonprofit community development corporation.

Mashantucket Pequot

Another of the mainstays of economic development in Indian country is what the Mashantucket Pequots of Connecticut have been



able to accomplish with the development of the largest casino on the Western hemisphere. The Pequot story is one of self-determination and economic success. For a detailed history of the tribe, please visit their [website](#). Throughout the centuries, the Pequot lands had been gradually diminished or disposed of through treaty or conquest efforts like terra nullius or vacuum domicilium with the last historical land holding being 212 acres in 1855. Two half sisters preserved the land base by being the only two persons living on the reservation in the 1960's. In 1974, the tribe started to reorganize and formed a constitution that laid the groundwork for economic development with two main goals; economic self-sufficiency and housing for its members. Economic development programs at the time included crafts projects, a greenhouse, and establishing the tribal office.

The tribe sought federal recognition in the 1970's and 1980's as well as petitioning to reclaim some of their land. In 1983, Congress passed the Mashantucket Pequot Indian Claims Settlement Act which among other things provided for federal recognition and provided \$900,000 to buy back land. This landmark bill and the 1988 Indian Gaming Regulatory Act built the road for the Foxwoods Resort and Casino.

The Pequots are lucky in the sense that the casino is in a densely populated part of the country. In fact, 10 percent of the U.S. population is within a 100-mile radius of the casino. This kind of volume, unlike the location of many Indian casinos, helped to ensure its success.

Designing the Economic Development Curriculum

It is important to keep in mind the literature and previous methods that have been tried in order to either build on those or refrain from repeating past mistakes. It is also important to keep in mind that even though reservations face similar obstacles in their economic development and reservation setting, that they are each unique sovereign nations that differ culturally, socially, linguistically, and geographically. Keeping these facts in mind when developing a curriculum is relevant because of these differences and in designing new training or curriculum it is important to focus on culturally relevant strategies. The following summarizes some of the key economic development initiatives. Professors Stephen Cornell and Joe Kalt from the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University are two of the pre-eminent researchers and writers on this topic. In 2001 they published "One Works, the Other Doesn't: Two Approaches to Economic Development on American Indian Reservations."²³

The Standard Approach to Development in Indian Country	The Nation Building Approach
1. Is short term, non-strategic 2. Lets someone else set the development	1. Long term strategy of sustainability

<p>agenda</p> <p>3. Treats economic development as an economic problem</p> <p>4. Views indigenous culture as an obstacle to development</p> <p>5. Reduces elected leadership to a distributor of resources</p>	<p>2. Takes charge in setting the agenda</p> <p>3. Treats economic development as a component to community development</p> <p>4. Development programs match the culture</p> <p>5. Reduces elected leadership to a legal and policy framework that encourages business development and community well-being</p>
<p>The Standard Five-Step Development Process in Indian Country</p>	<p>The Five-Steps to Nation Building</p>
<p>1. The tribal council or president tells the tribal planner to identify business ideas and funding sources</p> <p>2. The planner applies for federal grants or other funds and responds to outside initiatives</p> <p>3. The tribe starts whatever it can find funding for</p> <p>4. Tribal politicians appoint their political supporters to run development projects</p> <p>5. The tribal council or president micromanages enterprises and programs, controlling the decisions</p>	<p>1. The tribal council and president works with and supports the tribal planner as an autonomous business development source</p> <p>2. The tribe is self-funding</p> <p>3. The tribe funds projects with a strategic objective</p> <p>4. There is a separation between government and business</p> <p>5. The tribal council or president supports enterprises and programs, decentralizes decision making to the most appropriate level</p>
<p>Typical Results of the Standard Model of Development in Indian Country</p>	<p>Intended Results of the Nation Building Model</p>
<p>1. Failed enterprises</p> <p>2. A politics of spoils</p> <p>3. An economy highly dependent on</p>	<p>1. Sustainable enterprise</p> <p>2. A separation of politics and business</p> <p>3. An autonomous economy of highly</p>

<p>federal dollars and decision making</p> <p>4. An impression of incompetence and chaos that undermines the defense of tribal sovereignty</p> <p>5. Continued poverty</p>	<p>independent decision-makers</p> <p>4. Retention of human talent</p> <p>5. A more effective defense of sovereignty</p> <p>6. Economic and community development marked by decreased levels of poverty</p>
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“In summary, the standard model follows a short-sighted agenda of reactionary quick fixes and crisis management. Its failure to think strategically makes the tribe vulnerable to dependency on federal aid. The Nation Building approach puts the tribe in the driver’s seat” (Burdett and Lovely, III 2004:4)²⁴.

The Heartland Center Approach: Case Studies and Teaching Profiles:

For each of the Reservations visited, a case study and a teaching profile were created to aid in the delivery of the curriculum in Bismarck, North Dakota in April, 2006. The case studies utilized a methodology called Appreciative Inquiry, looking at the best and what works on reservations rather than focusing on the negative aspects of economic development in Indian Country. The following is a sample of one of the case studies and teaching profiles, both from the Turtle Mountain reservation of North Dakota. The remaining case studies and teaching profiles can be sent to readers interested in obtaining a copy ([Heartland Center](#)).



(Google Image)

Turtle Mountain Case Study

Located in beautiful prairie pothole region in the Turtle Mountains 11 miles from Canada and 19 miles from the International Peace Garden, the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Reservation is located in North central North Dakota in Rolette County and is the most densely populated reservation of all federally recognized tribes. The reservation encompasses 72 square miles with 16,500 persons living on or near the reservation and 11,116 of these are tribal members. Total tribal enrollment for the Tribe is 35,000. The linguistic family of the tribe is Algonquian (Algic) and the subgroup is Central and Plains Algonquian. Related languages include Arapaho, Shawnee, Fox, and Blackfoot. Many members of the tribe are fluent in French as well from a strong French influence and many customs and cuisines from this influence have also been adopted. Chippewa ethnonyms include Ojibway, Ojibwa, Anisnabai, Anishinabe, Anishinaabe, and Anishinabek. "Final settlement of the claims of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians was provided for in a treaty made October 2, 1892, which was amended and approved by Congress April 21, 1904. By the terms of this treaty, the Turtle Mountain Band ceded claims to all territory except two townships within the Turtle Mountain area. The treaty further provided for a cash payment of \$1,000,000 to the tribe for the land ceded (9,000,000 acres). Provisions were also made for the allotting of the reservation and the allotting of such other lands within the public domain as might be necessary for the members of the tribe unable to secure land within the designated reservation" (Bureau of Indian Affairs 1966:2)²⁵. Today, the land area has been reduced to 69,587 acres, of which 63,304 acres are used by tribal members and 4,939 acres are used by non-Indians (1,344 acres lay idle).

Although there is ample information in the literature regarding Chippewa and Ojibway culture in general, the literature is scant with regard to the Turtle Mountain Band in several categories including ethnographic and economic development. One source on economic development is a 1978 Federal Home Loan Bank of Minneapolis study entitled "A Regional Economic Analysis of the Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation: Determining Potential for Commercial Development"²⁶ by James Murray and James J. Davis. The intent of their study "is not so much to document the economic problems on the reservation as to identify some tools of regional economic analysis and demonstrate how they can be used for potential development" (Murray and Harris 1978: Author's Note)²⁷. Their major findings include:

- 1) The reservation and its economic activities are very important to the economic base of all of Rolette County. This observation may appear all too obvious, but because of high unemployment and a high incidence of welfare recipients, many non-Indian people view a reservation as a drain on their economy, rather than as an important source of employment and income for Indian and non-Indian people.
- 2) The economy of the reservation is closely integrated with that of the surrounding trade centers and should not be treated as a separate entity. This, too, may be obvious but many Indian people and some researchers would prefer to develop the reservation as a self-

contained unit disregarding the long standing relationship with surrounding communities. (Murray and Harris 1978:2)²⁸

The major employers on the Reservation include the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians (450 employees), Sky Dancer Hotel and Casino (300 employees), Turtle Mountain Community Schools, Indian Health Service, Turtle Mountain Community College, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Uniband, Dynaband which provides inbound/outbound call center services for insurance business and related services such as lead generation and sales for financial institutions. Dynaband employs 40 licensed insurance agents in Property & Casualty and Life & Health. Dynaband also specializes in quantitative market research, conducting customer satisfaction surveys, B2B & B2C surveys, political opinion polls and advertising awareness. Turtle Mountain Manufacturing is a welding and metal fabrication industry that employs 100-160 employees with the capacity to employ up to 300. Other employers include Chiptronics and Turtle Mountain Housing.

Tribal Council Organization

The Tribal Council is made up of eight persons, two elected from each of the represented districts on the reservation and a council chairperson who is elected at large. Elections are held every two years. Meetings are held on the first Wednesday of the month with special and ad hoc meetings at the call of the chairman. The tribe operates under a constitution and by-laws that were approved in 1959. The tribal headquarters is located in Belcourt.

Demographic Profile

According to the 2000 Census, there were 8,331 persons living on the Turtle Mountain Reservation. Of this number 4,125 are male and 4,206 are female. The median age is 23.7 years. Of the 8,331, 8,043 persons are American Indian or Alaska Native and 303 are white, the second largest ethnic group located there.

Income in 1999 (Households)	Number	Percent
Less than \$10,000	684	27.7
\$10,000 to \$14,999	273	11.1
\$15,000 to \$24,999	334	13.5
\$25,000 to \$34,999	301	12.2

\$35,000 to \$49,999	408	16.5
\$50,000 to \$74,999	312	12.6
\$75,000 to \$99,999	84	3.4
\$100,000 to \$149,999	54	2.2
\$150,000 to \$199,999	5	0.2
\$200,000 or more	13	0.5

The overall median household income in 1999 was \$23,630 as compared with the median family income of \$25,417 ([US Census 2000](#)).

Gaming

The Sky Dancer Hotel and casino (at right) opened in 1993 and has gone through several locations and name changes before finding its permanent home five miles west of Belcourt. The Casino offers over 500 slot machines and table games like poker, blackjack, let-it-ride, and philem-up. The hotel has 97 rooms.



Educational Institutions

The educational institutions at Turtle Mountain include elementary, middle and high schools as well as private and parochial schools such as Ojibwa Indians School (K-8), St Anns Parochial School (K-8), Turtle Mountain Head Start, St. John Public School (K-12) and Kindergarten through twelfth grades schools in nearby Dunseith. Turtle Mountain Community College in Belcourt has over 700 students enrolled and is the only post-secondary educational institution in the immediate region. Turtle Mountain Community College offers numerous degrees and certificates within departments of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences; Science, Math, Health/Physical Education; Teacher Education; and Department of Career and Technical Education. Within the Department of Teacher Education, a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education is offered. Some of the certificate programs include Entrepreneurship/Small Business, Casino Management, History, Art, Tribal Paralegal, and Business Administration. The Entrepreneurship/Small Business program is a nine-month certificate that provides tribal members the background and basic tools to start and operate their own business. Students

graduate creating a job rather than seeking employment. Courses within the program include Entrepreneurship I and II, Principles of Bookkeeping, and Workplace Communications.



Turtle Mountain Community College



Turtle Mountain High School

Current Economic Development Initiatives

The Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians has several economic development policies and programs in place. In fact, it was one of the first reservations to attract an industrial employer with the William Langer Jewel Bearing Plant in 1974 which made precision jewels for the Army Ordinance and Bulova Watch Company.

In February 2002, the tribe was designated as a Renewal Community by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development with the purpose to stimulate economic and community development on the reservation. This initiative offers residents and businesses certain tax incentives to establish businesses on the reservation. The Renewal Community also acts as an incubator nurturing entrepreneurs through the process of business plan development, start up and implementation that has helped six businesses get started that included a portable welder, mechanic, crafter, lawn care, and a farrier. The following is a small story told to the field team by Renewal Community staff that emphasizes the entrepreneurship they are fostering.

As an example, one company here that is starting a lawn care business, after Betty talked to him he decided this lawn care business is really fine, but it's only a little stepping stone to what can happen. Maybe I should start spraying trees and get into pesticide and herbicide business. And

now he's making plans to get trucks and he's going to be doing the [pest control] for the buildings here. If we have people from Minot or Bismarck come do it, they take all that money and they're gone. We have a local young fella here that's willing to get that training and get certified in restricted chemical applications and he can do that kind of thing. And he's making money and probably hiring 2 or 3 people and that's economic development.

That's what we're doing in this office here and I'm real pleased with that. We've set up six people in business so far. We'll help them with the financing too. We'll put the whole financial packet together for them after they do their work. We'll have them do their work and tell us what they want to do. They sit down and tell us what their plan is, how they're going to do it, how you envision a financial statement to be, what you think marketing is, etc. Have a mini course in entrepreneurship. That's what she does and it's working real well.

The Turtle Mountain Band is the only reservation in the U.S. to receive the Renewal Community designation. Since 1995, the tribe has been designated a CONAC/REAP Zone. CONAC (Center of North America Coalition for Rural Development) is a fund created to retain capital in the region and to benefit communities by providing seed capital to help business create new jobs. The fund emphasizes value-added food and nonfood products, technology and machinery, information service, and international trade. The REAP ([Rural Economic Area Partnership](#)) mission improves economic viability, diversity, and competitiveness of the local economy, assists local communities to develop cooperative strategies that will maintain and expand community functions such as infrastructure, education and health care. The tribe has also been designated a "Champion Community" which gives the Tribe extra points when they apply for U.S.D.A. Rural Development solicitations.



Uniband

Entrepreneurship at Turtle Mountain

According to informants, the Turtle Mountain reservation boasts 400 different entrepreneurs ranging from electricians to carpenters to consultants. This is not a surprising number as Murray and Harris (1978)²⁹ found that the reservation has "a greater number of Indian people as proprietors of retail establishments than any other reservation in the Upper Midwest and there is a long tradition of Indian ownership and management on and near the reservation" (Murray and Harris 1978:1-2)³⁰. In fact, "entrepreneurship has been a part of Native American culture for

centuries, but it was lost in the reservation system. Now we must get it back” (Clement 2006:3)³¹ quoting David “White Thunder” Trottier in the March 2006 issue of the Fedgazette. Trottier is the CEO of Chiptronics, a company located just outside the Turtle Mountain Reservation in the community of Dunseith.



Jollies Supermarket

Teaching Profile

The full text of each case study presents an analysis of the data for the questions that were asked of each informant. This analysis was then used to build what we call the Teaching Profile, a rather short but succinct synopsis of the data analysis that brings the data into a readable, and useful format, especially in mass training situations.

An example of a “teaching profile” that the Heartland Center developed from the ethnographic fieldwork phase of the project is shown [below](#).

Turtle Mountain Teaching Profile Lessons Learned

The next step was to acquire the lessons learned from participants in the April 2006 training in which people were asked to read the case study and then discuss it as a group gleaning the lessons learned. These lessons were put into a SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results) framework.

Strengths	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Renewal Community Designation through HUD * Tribal college * Skydancer Casino and Hotel * Entrepreneurship and small businesses * SBDC * Has large and well trained workforce 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Uniband looking for other avenues to generate income * Expansion of services or business to keep money from leaving * Incorporate language/culture from elementary to college * Wind farm

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Tribal college * Size of reservation (small) * Northwest Area Foundation partnership * Adoption of uniform commercial code * Has their own hospital with local Indian doctors * Has their own buffalo herd * Geographic location separation of powers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Attraction of outside investment (tax incentives) * Existing economic engines, Turtle Mountain Manufacturing * Brought in houses from the Air Force Base * Encouraging people to further their education * Build an Enterprise Center for business incubation * Build a juvenile detention center * The uniform commercial code allows long term sustainability for business and manufacturers * Beautiful location-tourism
<p>Aspirations</p>	<p>Results</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Capitalize on tourism industry * Revitalize downtown * Assist with housing problems * Own and operate the utility company * Development of their own housing manufacturing * Staggered term and four-year term for council * Their own financial institution * Move from tribal economy to private sector economy * Become a foreign trade zone and utilize location to work with Canada, First Nations * Would like to have a nursing home * To utilize their own herd to feed people * Become a destination resort location * Diversify the economy * Sustain and retain existing businesses * Nurture entrepreneurs * Home mortgage lender 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Better education that's culturally sensitive * Better jobs-higher paying/quality * Quality of life/better life style * More and better housing * More outside investment and partnerships * Ability to become a lending institution for their own people * Distribution point for exports and imports * Continuity in Tribal Government * Positive use of their own population, i.e. Tribal unity * Revenue generation * Highly educated population * Positive expression of sovereignty * More home grown/grass roots entrepreneurs * More home owners

Creating the 25 Characteristics of Economic Development in Indian Country: Traits that Lead to Sustainability.

After the fieldwork was completed and the teaching profiles and case studies created, a training session with tribal economic development representatives was held at United Tribes Technical College in Bismarck, North Dakota, in April 2006. The purpose of this training was to field test the curriculum, case studies, and teaching profiles. Throughout the training, facilitators utilized an approach called Appreciative Inquiry to help participants sift through and find out what was working best on each of the reservations that were highlighted. A final measurement instrument created during this process led to formulation and refining of “25 Characteristics of Reservations Positioned for Sustainable Economic Development Success.” The tables linked below are some of the products that will be incorporated into a final workbook format.

25 Characteristics

25 Characteristics of Reservations Positioned for Sustainable Economic Development Success

1. Balance between traditional wisdom and new approaches.
2. Proactive council that works in tandem with economic development professionals.
3. Separation of politics and business.
4. Continuity in tribal government.
5. Commitment to economic self sufficiency.
6. Multiple revenue streams created through diversified economic strategies.
7. Keen awareness of internal assets combined with smart use of external resources.
8. Tribal commitment to supporting entrepreneurial efforts and encouraging entrepreneurial spirit.
9. Evidence of an investment culture.
10. Adoption and/or creation of a uniform commercial code.
11. In-place structure guaranteeing an autonomous judiciary.
12. Positioned to take advantage of incentive programs such as 8A, 638.

13. Use of failures and successes to build collective knowledge about managing enterprises.
14. Evidence of a strategic focus in both economic and community development.
15. Willingness to collaborate within the tribe and with other entities.
16. Proactive stance with respect to both internal and external opportunities.
17. Emphasis on the value of spending dollars locally.
18. Recognition of the importance of sovereignty.
19. Recognition of the importance of cultural relevance.
20. Attention to multiple capitals that include social and cultural networks, human capital, financial capital and infrastructure.
21. Strategy to develop tribal financial institutions and/or build successful partnerships with external financial institutions.
22. Importance of having “champions” for community and economic development.
23. Evidence that the tribe is discarding “the BIA mentality.”
24. Support for child care, K-16 and lifelong education.
25. Importance of strong, locally-based institutions (health and wellness, social services, education, etc.).

The Heartland Center for Leadership Development identified 25 characteristics found among thriving reservation communities. These characteristics relate to broad capacity building initiatives.

*Capacity***Characteristics of Reservations Positioned for Sustainable Economic Development Success**

Capacity	Characteristics
<i>Cultural Retention</i>	<p>1. Balance between traditional wisdom and new approaches.</p> <p>19. Recognition of the importance of cultural relevance</p>
<i>Sovereignty</i>	<p>5. Commitment to economic self sufficiency.</p> <p>18. Recognition of the importance of sovereignty.</p> <p>23. Evidence that the tribe is discarding “the BIA mentality.”</p>
<i>Leadership</i>	<p>2. Proactive council that works in tandem with economic development professionals.</p> <p>3. Separation of politics and business.</p> <p>4. Continuity in tribal government.</p> <p>8. Tribal commitment to supporting entrepreneurial efforts and encouraging entrepreneurial spirit.</p> <p>11. In-place structure guaranteeing an autonomous judiciary.</p> <p>22. Importance of having “champions” for community and economic development.</p>
<i>Strategic Agenda</i>	<p>9. Evidence of an investment culture.</p> <p>10. Adoption and/or creation of a uniform commercial code.</p> <p>12. Positioned to take advantage of incentive programs such as 8A, 638.</p> <p>13. Use of failures and successes to build collective knowledge about managing enterprises.</p> <p>14. Evidence of a strategic focus in both economic and community</p>

	<p>development.</p> <p>15. Willingness to collaborate within the tribe and with other entities.</p> <p>16. Proactive stance with respect to both internal and external opportunities.</p>
<i>Strong Local Economy</i>	<p>6. Multiple revenue streams created through diversified economic strategies.</p> <p>7. Keen awareness of internal assets combined with smart use of external resources</p> <p>17. Emphasis on the value of spending dollars locally.</p>
<i>Emphasis on Community Capitals</i>	<p>20. Attention to multiple capitals that include social and cultural networks, human capital, financial capital and infrastructure.</p> <p>21. Strategy to develop tribal financial institutions and/or build successful partnerships with external financial institutions.</p> <p>24. Support for child care, K-16 and lifelong education.</p> <p>25. Importance of strong, locally-based institutions (health and wellness, social services, education, etc.).</p>

Teaching Profile Example [\[back to text\]](#)

Entrepreneurial Growth on the Turtle Mountain Reservation

The Turtle Mountain Reservation is growing entrepreneurs. This community has to! What makes earning a living so difficult is an unemployment rate of 72%, few employment opportunities, and one of the most isolated and smallest reservations in the United States. But there are a lot of enterprising and supportive people that make Turtle Mountain an incubator for entrepreneurship, with more than 400 entrepreneurs out of a total population of 16,500.

Lyman Bercier is one of the people that help to grow entrepreneurs. He is the Chief Executive Officer of the Renewal Community and has been involved in entrepreneur development for 35 years, four of those with the Renewal Community. Lyman is a true champion for economic development and has recently been appointed an Economic Development Trade Ambassador for the State of North Dakota.

The tribe is the only Native American community to receive the Renewal Community designation and one of only 40 Renewal Communities nationwide. This designation along with the Small Business Development Corporation (SBDC a tribal college sponsored development center that holds seminars on start-ups, and provides technical assistance to business owners), provides avenues that will lead to more sustainability. There has been a lot going on for some time that is not sustainable as seen in the almost empty Uniband (a data entry company that employed up to 1,000) and Turtle Mountain Manufacturing, a welding and fabrication company that is also a shell of its former self. Uniband lost its 8-A status and, with that gone, the tribe is looking for other avenues to generate income.

The Renewal Community has developed six entrepreneurs recently that include a traveling welder, traveling mechanic, crafter, lawn care and snow removal, and a farrier. Sustainability is something that Bercier helps to foster as well. The entrepreneur involved in snow removal wanted to expand beyond this seasonal activity into lawn care and pesticide treatment. So he helped line up the financing and educational framework so this entrepreneur could develop a year-round business.

Phyllis Jollie also agrees that individual entrepreneurship is the key to the future success of Turtle Mountain. "There is a group of business people and partnerships working with the BIA and the tribe. I don't know if you see a lot of that on reservations (that is) Indian people who own and operate retail business. I think that's the future." Jollie should know, as she reflects back 35 years ago when she and her husband started Jollies Fairway (a supermarket in Belcourt) with 13 employees. Ben D. James also agrees. Owning a convenience store for a number of years, his business growth reflects an entrepreneurial spirit. He is expanding his businesses to include a state of the art car wash, a lounge, and now has more than 70 employees.

The Jollies started their business with a small loan from the Bureau of Indian Affairs. At that time you could apply for funding of up to 15-20% of the startup costs, then take that to the Small Business Administration or to local banks to complete the financing package. “This (financing from the Bureau of Indian Affairs) is not available today to Indian businesses. And a lot of Indian people cannot come up with the 20% investment upfront,” she said. “Why did they do away with such an important program if you want to build the economy of Indian reservation? Why would they do away with a program if it worked?”

“Growing local entrepreneurs is critical. The more local entrepreneurs we have, the better our local economy,” she said. “For example when we need to have a refrigerator technician we have to pay someone from Minot or even further to drive out to make those repairs. Not only are we paying a lot of unnecessary costs for travel but they are taking money away from the community. One niche that is being explored is a sporting goods store.”

Jollie reiterates the importance living in a multi-cultural world and maintaining traditional and cultural norms and values. “And (the people of Turtle Mountain) need to know that it’s not a sin to make a profit. A lot of times if you think back to traditional ways, you share, you give. But in business, you have to make a profit to survive. So we have to learn and change our way of thinking--that’s not a bad thing anymore.” She and others also acknowledge that it is of utmost importance to maintain the cultural traditions of the community. They are seeing that happen today with an emphasis by school boards on teaching a curriculum that incorporates Chippewa language and culture from the elementary level though college.

Keeping people in the community and growing entrepreneurs means that dollars will also be kept in the community. Jeremy Laducer, the tribe’s Transportation Planning Director, knows all too well. He conducted an economic impact study and found that the dollars that come into the community versus those that leave the community track in the 2% range. “People are basically cashing their checks and heading out,” he says.

Economic development in this community is difficult because of its geographic isolation and limitations on natural resources. But Charles Trottier, the tribe’s Natural Resources Planner, sees this differently. A tribal wind farm has the most promise. This part of North Dakota has a lot of wind readily available, and studies have been conducted here on the amount and availability of wind. The wind farms would provide energy to the community and surplus electricity could be sold back to the grid.

Economic development is also viewed differently by many. The Skydancer Casino generates revenue and employs 300 people but also has a lot of turnover. There is a lot of overhead and revenue is often directed toward paying down debt. Visitors do come to the casino via travel agencies or because the tribe is offering discounted or free bus rides to bring people to the Skydancer. However, many who visit the casino typically don’t spend a lot of money and are just looking for a cheap trip somewhere. Because of this, many in Belcourt want to capitalize on the tourism industry and revitalize the downtown, bringing outside dollars into local shops.

Sustainability is one of the keys, according to Bercier. “Economic development is development through whatever means--education, technology, jobs, quality of life--all the things that make for a better life style. If you do it properly and look at a long term approach rather than a short term fix such as bringing a company, that makes millions over seven to eight years and then they’re gone again, is not true sustainable economic development. But, if we can take people and train them and educate them and make them appreciative of what they’ve got, make them feel like they’re contributing to society, and they’ve got an important role, and everybody does, and they can recognize that nobody can take that away from them.” This sentiment is reflected in the fact that Renewal Community has recently helped bring in Nova Inc., a telemarketing company from Philadelphia, PA that now employs 100 people and plans to add another 150 within a year. Lyman has noticed a change in the community and notes that “the work is pleasant, the pay is fair, people enjoy the work, and they are enjoying a better quality of life. I see more people at the store, driving cars around, and just an overall better attitude about themselves.”

Turtle Mountain Community College is credited with encouraging entrepreneurship and small business development. With a small business development center and nine-month entrepreneurship program whose goals are to graduate students that create a job rather than graduating and seeking a job, the college is helping to turn out more and younger entrepreneurs. Dr. Jim Davis, president of TMCC, feels education is the key to the sustainability of their reservation: “The college is a jewel. It’s afforded our students to think beyond high school and then even to think beyond a two-year, to go on and get a masters and a doctorate.”

Another cultivator of entrepreneurs is Chad Decoteau. Decoteau, a full time Emergency Medical Technician and a business instructor at Turtle Mountain Community College, is also currently taking part in the Gonzaga University Master of Business Administration program that has an emphasis on American Indian Entrepreneurship. He teaches Entrepreneurship 1 and 2. Entrepreneurship 1 focuses on information and procedures needed to start up and operate a small business, such as business plan creation, market research, accounting, and finance. Entrepreneurship 2 is more advanced and focuses on operating a small business and refining the business plan.

Everyone agrees that education is the most important factor in the future of the Turtle Mountain Reservation, and they speak highly of the work that is going on at Turtle Mountain Community College. And professionals are returning to the community, thanks to Turtle Mountain Community College. These include doctors, lawyers, and other white-collar professionals who got their first education at TMCC.

As Turtle Mountain looks toward the future, tribal leaders realize they need to market and cater to business coming into their community. There is a workforce of 4,000 available and testing has shown that residents in the community have some of the best hand-eye coordination of any community in the nation, a skill that data entry companies would find valuable. The tax credits and incentives offered through the tribe and the Renewal Community also foster the potential for

further economic growth. But tribal leaders believe that the home grown grassroots entrepreneurs ultimately will make the biggest impact in this community.

Additional Comments [\[back to text\]](#)

- Balance of community development with economic development – attention on both
- Separation of business and politics
- How to find information on resources that can help with development?
- Collaborations across tribes to learn from one another – networking among and within tribes.
- Difference when you partner with those outside the reservation.
- Collective knowledge
- Knowing your community capitals.
- All of the successes – there was a plan in place – that was the starting place.
- Projects take time – they don't happen overnight and because of planning they were able to carry the project out.
- Recognize that we are making changes now that will impact future generations.
- Planning should include contingency plans.
- Look for strategies to address healthcare costs.
- Reservations see in and out of large amounts of funding which impact communities close to the reservation.
- More clout than we believe we have because of the economic impact of tribal programs and resources.
- Provide an opportunity to work with banks for example, there are no Indians on bank Board of Directors.
- Every tribe should do an impact study and a return on investment. Is there a formula that could be shared with all the tribes?
- Building a work ethic.
- Train tribal judges in utilizing the commercial code.

- Consider linking incentives to production increases.
- Entrepreneurship and recognizing that it is traditional to culture.
- Collaborative marketing.
- Create a community asset database.
- Buy locally; reinvest in your own community.
- Incorporate culture into projects—appropriate ways to sell—what belongs to us.
- Mentorship/internships.
- Tradition oriented, collaborate with outside without losing our history and tradition.
- Support for a business for a first year.
- Utilize natural resources for cottage industries: wine, jellies, buffalo, vineyards.
- Ground blessings.
- Protection of cultural and intellectual property.
- Choose industries that don't harm environment.
- Maximize resources and technologies.
- Inter-tribal collaboration.
- Web presence.
- Practice sustainable development and stewardship.
- Don't sell what should not be sold.
- Challenge thoughts that are truisms but really are not.
- Work toward attitude change.
- Embrace pollution control principles.

End Notes: Kurt Mantonya and Milan Wall, "Economic Development in Indian Country: Traits that Lead to Sustainability." [*Online Journal of Rural Research & Policy*](#) (2007.3).

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[\[back\]](#)

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Kurt Mantonya is an applied cultural anthropologist with more than 15 years of experience in the central plains and southwest. He brings to the Heartland Center experience in Native American and Latino cultural issues, project coordination, collaborative community based planning, and the rapid growth of rural communities. He's been involved in numerous projects involved with applied cultural anthropology of the Great Plains, health care issues in the Native American and Latino communities, and policy analysis.



Mr. Mantonya's professional interests include the Society for Applied Anthropology, American Anthropological Association, International Association for Public Participation, and many other anthropological associations and societies. He received a Masters Degree in Anthropology from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in 2002 and a B.S. in Sociology from Kansas State University in 1994. Before coming to the Heartland Center, he served as program director of the AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps*VISTA programs for the City of Lincoln Parks and Recreation.

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Milan Wall, Co-Director of the Heartland Center for Leadership Development, is a management and communications expert with more than 30 years experience in dealing with the critical issues facing American society and culture. Mr. Wall has been a newspaper reporter and editorial columnist, a university lecturer and a speaker at regional and national conferences on such topics as educational leadership, economic development, and uses of technology in education. Before he helped found the Heartland Center, he was Executive Vice President of the University of Mid-America, a multi-state consortium that was recognized internationally for its imaginative approaches to adult education.



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